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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001207

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
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DS/OP/AF

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC LOOKS TO THE FUTURE; TSVANGIRAI SPENDS ANOTHER NIGHT IN CUSTODY

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER PEGGY BLACKFORD FOR REASON 1.5B/D

Summary

1. (C) MDC leaders worried that President Mugabe might try to influence the judiciary to keep their president, Morgan Tsvangirai, in jail for a month or more. They welcomed the

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reported visit of President Bush to the region and hoped that it would step up pressure for dialogue. They judged last week's mass action to be a success overall and were especially pleased with the favorable media coverage the events had received in South Africa. In the coming month, the party's priorities will include party building, international policy development and communication as well as preparing for dialogue and a transition government. Their budget has been strained by the need in recent days to pay a large number of legal fees, fines, medical expenses and to provide shelter for those under threat.

MDC Leaders Concerned for Tsvangirai

2. (C) At dinner with the Ambassador and PolOff June 11, MDC leaders, Vice-President Gibson Sibanda, Secretary-General Welshman Ncube, and spokesman Paul Nyathi expressed their concern for President Morgan Tsvangirai. He had been brought to court for his bail hearing in the morning wearing prison khakis and in handcuffs and leg-irons. Upon application by his attorney, he was permitted to change into his own clothes. The hearing; however, had not concluded by late afternoon and was continued until June 12. The MDC leaders do not believe that the Judge is likely to hand down a ruling before Friday if then. They have heard rumors that Mugabe is pressuring the judiciary to keep Tsvangirai in jail for at least a month "to teach him a lesson." They asked the US to intervene urgently with the South Africans to bring pressure to bear to get Tsvangirai released.

3. (C) Ncube who was arrested June 9 on charges similar to those pending against Tsvangirai, namely making public statements calling on people to oust Mugabe, was released after one night in prison. He was very grateful to be out. The Ambassador inquired if he felt that the government had released him so promptly in an effort to drive an wedge between him and Tsvangirai. Interestingly, for one so skeptical about the independence of the judiciary, he rejected this possibility and seemed to believe that his release was simply the result of the fact that the government failed to make a good case. He could prove he was not at several of the meetings where he was alleged to have made statements.

Relying on International Initiatives

4. (C) All three leaders were delighted with press reports that President Bush is to visit South Africa next month. They believed that such a visit would put great pressure on President Mbeki to get a real dialogue going. Asked where they stood with the South Africans, they said that the MDC had furnished the SAG with a memo laying out its priorities and conditions weeks ago and had not yet received any feedback from either the South Africans or ZANU-PF. They believe that the South Africans were still awaiting a ZANU-PF reaction.

Evaluating Last Week's Mass Action

5. (C) Asked to judge their success in last week's mass action, they all professed to be quite content with the result. Sibanda said that they had always expected that the demonstrations would fail to materialize, but announced them anyway in the anticipation that the government would crack down as it did and assure a very successful stayaway. The Ambassador raised the issue of unmet expectations. Sibanda

acknowledged that some people had interpreted the "final push" rhetoric literally and might be disappointed but overall none of the leaders seemed to believe that their support had eroded in any significant way. Nyathi, who spent last week in South Africa, was very pleased with the coverage the events had received in the South African media. He believed that the MDC had gained considerable support among the South African population which would be useful in motivating the SAG to push harder for dialogue. He did indicate that he believed the mass action had uncovered a weakness in the party's internal communication system which would have to be addressed.

Next Steps

16. (C) PolOff asked the leaders what came after last week's mass action. Ncube said that they were planning to lay low and let tempers cool for a couple of weeks and then they would try to get negotiations back on track. Although admitting that Mugabe had never negotiated with his domestic opponents except from a position of overwhelming strength, Ncube and Sibanda pointed out that he had done so on occasion in international disputes. They pointed out that although Nkomo and his ZAPU party had been emasculated in negotiations in the 80's, ZAPU had no international support and, in fact, many in the West were so anxious to see Zimbabwe succeed that they had encouraged ZAPU to agree to a settlement. They also distanced themselves from Nkomo who they intimated had sold out for a high-ranking position and a comfortable life. Ncube also said they would be continuing to focus on three main objectives: party building, international policy and communication. In response to an inquiry from the Ambassador, Sibanda confirmed that they were continuing to work on a Blue Book of policies which would form the basis for a transition government.

Difficulties

17. (C) The leaders were asked about finances or other difficulties they might be facing. Sibanda replied that while their budget was not in as good a shape as it was last year, that was only to be expected given the current inflation rate. Ncube said that their big problem over the last 10 days or so has been raising enough money for legal fees and fines for those arrested, medical expenses for supporters who were injured and particularly shelter for those afraid to go home. The Ambassador promised to look into the use of the Victims of Torture Fund to see if we could assure that USAID funds to cover these expenses were made available expeditiously. (Note: Part of the problem has been GOZ harassment of fund managers.)

Comment

18. (C) Although clearly tired and somewhat dismayed at being pursued by GOZ forces of law and order, on the whole the MDC leadership still at liberty seemed relatively upbeat and relaxed. They appear to be planning well for the future and making the most of opportunities to bring international pressure to bear on Mugabe. Mugabe, however, has proved remarkably immune to such pressure in the past and shows no signs of believing that he needs to come to an understanding with the opposition.

SULLIVAN